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FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6651  
INFO RUCNCLC/CHILD LABOR COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1438  
RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC

UNCLAS PHNOM PENH 000911

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL/IL  
LABOR FOR ILAB--VIVITA ROZENBERGS  
GENEVA FOR RMA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [CB](#)

SUBJECT: CAMBODIAN GOVERNMENT, MANUFACTURERS PLEDGE CHILD  
LABOR ACTION

¶1. (U) During a May 4 International Labor Organization-International Program to End Child Labor (ILO-IPEC) event to publicize the ILO's second report on child labor, Garment Manufacturers Association of Cambodia (GMAC) president Van Sou Ieng outlined GMAC's policy on child labor. He said that any garment factory found to employ underage workers must remove children from the factory, pay for their tuition at a vocational training center, and pay them a regular factory salary during their vocational training. The factory must also agree to re-hire the workers once they turn 15, the legal age for employment. Van Sou Ieng threatened to publicly discredit any factory that fails to follow this program.

¶2. (U) Minister of Labor Nhep Bunchin pledged to reduce child labor by 10% over the next five years. (Comment: This is a rather modest commitment given the ILO's goal of eliminating child labor by 2016. End comment.) Nhep Bunchin said that rates of child labor are dropping as parents realize the value of education and send their children to school rather than to work. He also lauded ILO-IPEC and RGC efforts pilot efforts to eliminate child labor in rubber plantations, brick making, and fishing sectors.

¶3. (U) In a private conversation with Econoff, Nhep Bunchin said that new employees for the Department of Child Labor--which was created in April 2005 but has only two staff members and no budget--should be in place within a month. However, Khy Sarin, Deputy Director of the Child Labor Department, told Labor Assistant that only three to five employees--out of more than 20 needed--will be appointed and that the process will take 1-2 months or more.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: GMAC understands that the survival of Cambodia's garment industry is predicated on high standards for workers' rights and that a lax policy on child labor would send many socially-conscious garment buyers packing. With a surplus of adult workers looking for jobs, underage labor is extremely rare in the garment sector. The few cases documented by the ILO factory monitoring project involve underage workers lying about their age and presenting fake documents. Thus GMAC's aggressive policy--which was actually put in to practice in an isolated incident several months ago--is more about sending a strong signal to buyers than about combating a significant problem. In contrast, the government continues to take baby steps to address child labor. Senior opposition official Mu Sochua equates the lack of progress with a lack of government commitment to provide the necessary funds for education and job creation that would motivate parents to keep their children in school. The

Ministry of Labor has been weakened by its split from the  
Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth  
Rehabilitation more than two years ago and by its ineffective  
FUNCINPEC leader in a CPP-dominated government. END COMMENT.  
STORELLA